

NEWS



Forest Service

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**Inyo
National Forest**

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The Boundary Peak Fire Crew Becomes A Certified Hotshot Crew

A local Inyo National Forest fire crew was recently certified as one of the newest Hotshot crews in the state of California, and they are just now wrapping up what has been a very busy season for them.

The Boundary Peak fire crew, based here in Bishop, began its life in 2001 as a 10-person fuels reduction crew with the goal of completing fuels reduction projects on the Inyo National Forest. When funding increased for fire suppression resources in 2002, the White Mt. Ranger district staff used the opportunity to increase staffing on the handcrew to 20 people, with the goal of eventually establishing the crew as a Type-I Hotshot fire crew.

A Hotshot crew is an elite wildland firefighting unit. Typically consisting of 20 people, hotshot crews fight wildland fires by digging handline, that is, clearing trees, bushes, and duff away from the fire's edge using chainsaws and handtools. Hotshot crews have higher requirements for the physical fitness, training, and experience of their crewmembers than do other types of fire crews. Thus hotshot crews are expected to perform at a higher level on the fireline. Hotshot crews are usually sent to the most active and hazardous parts of the fire, where their skill and experience are needed to cope with quickly changing and potentially dangerous situations. Currently, there are 43 Hotshot crews based in California, and 64 more based in the rest of the country.

After 7 years of growth and improvement, in August of this year the Boundary Peak crew succeeded in becoming a Hotshot crew. This process culminated with a two day review and evaluation that was conducted by a team of Regional Fire Managers and current Hotshot Superintendents. During the two day review process the review team made sure that the crew's administrative and operational procedures were consistent with those set forth nationally in the "Interagency Hotshot Operations Guide". After the team was satisfied that the crew had complied with administrative requirements, they moved on to some rigorous field testing to see how well the crew performed in fireline situations. At the conclusion of these drills the review team discussed what they had observed, and announced that the crew had successfully met and exceeded all requirements. After 30 years without, the Inyo National Forest once again has a Type-I Hotshot crew, the Boundary Peak Hotshots.

Hotshot Crews started in Southern California in the late 1940s on the Cleveland and Angeles National Forests. The name was in reference to the crews being sent to the

hottest part of fires. Nowadays, hotshot crews may be sent anywhere in the United States, wherever there are out of control wildfires. To cope with especially severe fires, hotshot crews have even been sent to Mexico and Canada. Their specialty is wildfire suppression, but they are sometimes assigned other jobs, including search and rescue, and disaster response assistance. The physical fitness standards, training requirements, and operational procedures of Hotshots are consistent nationwide. All crews require that personnel be available 24-hours per day, 7 days a week during the fire season, which typically last six months. When sent to a fire, the crew is often away from home for several weeks at a time. Usually, they travel to fires in their ten-person crew carrier trucks, followed by a hike into the work site. To get to the more remote fire sites, crews are often flown in by helicopter. Crew members carry all the water and supplies needed for work shifts that are usually between 12 and 16 hours. During extreme fire situations, when the fire is understaffed or when homes and public safety is threatened, work shifts can extend up to 48 hours. In between shifts, the crews usually sleep on the ground, and are lucky to get a shower once a week.

To prepare for the rigors of fighting fires, hotshots participate in physical training every day, consisting of running, hiking, and strength training. In addition to passing the pack test (carrying a 45 lb. pack across a flat 3 mile course in under 45 minutes), which is required of all federal wildland firefighters, hotshots have higher physical fitness standards. These include a 1.5 mile run in 10 minutes 35 seconds, 7 pull ups, 40 sit-ups in 1 minute, and 25 push-ups in 1 minute. The hotshot core values of "duty, integrity, and respect" along with lots of hard work have earned hotshot crews an excellent reputation throughout the United States as elite teams of professional wildland firefighters. Hotshots not busy fighting fire will usually work on resource projects in their local area, such as thinning, construction of fuelbreaks, prescribed fire, habitat improvement, and trail construction.

So if you see a group of people running in a line along Bishop's canals, or fueling up their crew vehicles at a local gas station, never mind their appearance or smell, smile and say good morning or welcome home, and know that all the sweat and soot and grime is willingly earned on your behalf by your Boundary Peak Hotshots. For anyone interested in seeing what it takes to be a Hotshot, feel free to come by the White Mtn. Ranger Station or call Ron Riise, Superintendent of the crew at 873-2506. The Boundary Peak Hotshots are always looking for tough individuals to introduce to wildland fire.

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